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Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women

Statement submitted by Soroptimist International, a non-governmental organization in general consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 30 and 31 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31 of 26 July 1996.

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Trafficking of women and girls

Soroptimist International (SI) is a worldwide organization for women in the professions and management, with approximately 100,000 members in 119 countries and territories around the world, who are actively engaged working through service projects to advance human rights and the status of women.

Our members believe strongly that violence of any kind is an intolerable act. In particular, SI condemns the use and/or threat of all violence against women. We join the Commission on the Status of Women in expressing concern that while much new legislation has been enacted on the multiple facets of violence against women, the issues themselves have never seemed as severe. Of particular and increasing concern is trafficking of women and girls, which United Nations figures indicate generates nearly $7 billion in profits per year.

Although Governments committed themselves, in adopting the Beijing Platform for Action, to take measures to eradicate trafficking of women and girls for exploitation of many kinds, international sexual slavery is one of the world's fastest growing industries. It is a global tragedy.

The extent of that evil trade was brought to the attention of Soroptimist members again by the founder of the Miramed Institute at the Sixteenth Soroptimist Convention, held at Helsinki in July 1999. The statistics, the visual evidence and the ensuing panel debate left an indelible impression upon delegates. As a result, our International President, Jane Zimmerman, adopted for her annual 10 December human rights appeal the theme "Soroptimists stop traffic", under which Soroptimists throughout the world donated funds to support the work of UNIFEM to create an anti-trafficking centre in the "red light" district at Mumbai, India. The main functions of the centre will include training, NGO networking, data collection and analysis. It will also provide a place for trafficked women to obtain legal, health, social assistance and access to economic alternatives to prostitution. The Miramed Institute's continuing work to prevent trafficking through education and media campaigns, the development of life/job programmes and shared information and data will also receive financial assistance from SI.

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In addition to the "Soroptimists stop traffic" project, our membership will continue to assist women and girls in avoiding recruitment into the sex industry through intervention programmes, such as the daughters' education programme and the Soroptimist International AIDS mediation programme, both in Thailand, which provide education and alternative forms of employment.

Trafficking is big business, powerful and dangerous. Watchdog groups estimate that since the early 1970s some 30 million women and children have fallen victim to the traffickers of human flesh. Owing to a lack of education and suitable employment, hopelessness and discrimination, women are being coerced and deceived and are at grave risk of trafficking. In bars, massage parlours and brothels, young women are being forced into the indentured ranks of the global sex industry.

Soroptimist International urges Governments to continue to implement legislation to halt and prevent all forms of violence against women and girls. We call upon departments of state and law enforcement agencies to monitor closely the falsification of passports, visas and educational visas. We support and encourage the exchange of data and other related information designed to bring the perpetrators of trafficking to the attention of the authorities.

Soroptimist International encourages Governments to work in partnership with NGOs to:

- Exchange information and views;
- Establish community awareness programmes for adults and children to prevent trafficking and sex abuse;
- Explore ways, develop methods and implement programmes to enable potential victims to avoid and resist the lure of traffickers;
- Create effective rehabilitation programmes for rescued victims and increase their self-esteem through practical development programmes;
- Combat child sexual exploitation and paedophilia, including Internet trafficking.

Soroptimist International pledges the support of its members worldwide in the war on violence against women, particularly the trafficking of women and girls.

A culture of peace

On 1 January 2000, technology enabled our world to share a unique moment in history when people everywhere joined together in joyful celebration. We truly were a global village. In this new millennium, SI would like to add its voice and vision to a global dialogue for peace.

We individuals and organizations who hope for peace must seize the opportunity, especially during this International Year of the Culture of Peace, to reaffirm our commitment and pledge ourselves to be more proactive in its promotion.

Our members have pledged to sign the manifesto 2000 and to support its principles in their daily lives, with their families, in their work and within their communities and countries.

SI will strive to promote a culture of peace by continuing to work with Governments, other agencies and educators to promote effective methods of conflict resolution; by condemning discrimination between peoples on the grounds of race, creed or ethnic origin; and by promoting human rights education and peace teaching. Our work on behalf of women and children affected by violence in all its forms will continue to be a priority.

In partnership with the International Red Cross, we are committed to a four-year programme to alleviate the plight of civilians affected by landmines through the "Limbs for life" programme.

The 1999 Soroptimist International President's appeal, on the theme "Soroptimists stop traffic", will assist UNIFEM and the Miramed Institute in their fight to stop trafficking of women and girls.

Soroptimist International urges Governments, the United Nations and its agencies, NGOs and other appropriate bodies to work in partnership to achieve:

- Greater international goodwill and understanding;
- A just sharing of the world's resources;
- Promotion of human rights for all people.

Soroptimist International recognizes that the attainment of peace demands mutual understanding and patient negotiation, and that tolerance for others must begin early in life, beginning with the family and continuing into formal education. We ask all member

States and educators to examine, review and revise all educational materials to ensure that they do not:

- Nurture racist or national arrogance;
- Cultivate racial, cultural or religious prejudice;
- Promote racism and racial discrimination;
- Incite/glorify physical violence.

Soroptimist International believes that living in peace should be the objective of all peoples and that peace cannot be measured by an absence of conflict. We are committed to global cooperation to foster international goodwill and understanding and universal friendship and to work in worldwide partnerships developing and promoting a culture of peace.